

VALENTYN SILVESTROV'S STRING QUARTETS WITHIN THE DYNAMICS OF GENRE TRADITION: FROM MODERNISM TO METAMUSIC

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SUMMARY. The article is devoted to studying the manifestation of the genre tradition of the string quartet in the music of Valentyn Silvestrov, tracing its diachronic dynamics from modernism to “metamusic”. Genre tradition is defined as a system that combines invariants (monotimbral ensemble, the one-player–one-part principle, quartettistic symphonism, dialogic chamber rhetoric) with variable peripheries (textural and timbral techniques, intertextual codes, articulation–metric profiles), through which the “memory of the genre” is preserved and renewed. The article examines *Quartetto piccolo* (1961), String Quartet No. 1 (1974), No. 2 (1988), and No. 3 (2011). On the basis of comparative analysis, it is demonstrating that: in the early period serial/sonoristic procedures are counterbalanced by lyric cantabile; the post-avant-garde phase articulates a dialogue between the romantic code and contemporary sound masses/cluster textures; the postludial poetics of silence and resonance acquires a form-bearing function; intercultural topoi (notably Irish modal–pastoral formulae in No. 3) are integrated within the quartet matrix without eroding identity. It is argued that Silvestrov's quartets operate as meta-texts of the European chamber tradition. The study proposes a typology of indicators (form, texture, intonation, dynamic relief, timbral technique, articulation/metric patterns, reception), offering a replicable protocol for further analyses and refining the understanding of how the quartet functions today as an actual model of musical memory.

Keywords: string quartet; genre tradition; style; metamusic; postludial poetics; intertextuality; Ukrainian music; Valentyn Silvestrov; modernism–postmodernism; quartettistic symphonism; modern music.

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Introduction

In the theory and history of music, the string quartet is reasonably considered a kind of “experimental laboratory” in which the leading dramaturgical and aesthetic tendencies of 20th-century European art are reflected with exceptional concentration. It is precisely in this chamber, seemingly “condensed” genre that composers have always felt greater freedom to test the boundaries of tonal organization, rhythmic structure, textural dramaturgy, and form-making – later translating these ideas into the more complex and large-scale symphonic space. In this context, Ukrainian music – which began its active development at the end of the 19th century – has been in constant interaction with European modernist, postmodernist, and now metamodernist movements. This makes it a subject of particular scholarly interest, as it not only assimilated universal models but also endowed them with its own intonational and, most importantly, cultural code. The figure of Valentyn Sylvestrov emerges here as a key one: his quartets are not merely lyrical or experimental statements, but rather specific “meta-texts” of the European chamber tradition, where the legacy of Classicism and Romanticism is intertwined with modernist shifts and the postmodern poetics of memory. The study of these works provides an opportunity to understand both the broader European discourse of the string quartet genre and the unique place of Ukrainian music within it.

Valentyn Sylvestrov’s artistic work occupies a prominent position not only in Ukrainian music of the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries but is also recognized as part of the global musical heritage. His compositions are actively performed both in Ukraine and abroad, attracting considerable interest from both listeners and researchers. A significant number of publications are devoted to studying his artistic legacy. However, his string quartets remain relatively insufficiently studied in both domestic and international musicology.

The aim of this study is to identify and theoretically substantiate the category of genre tradition of the string quartet as a key construct of the genre, ensuring the preservation and transmission of encoded information (intonational, textural, structural) in Valentyn Sylvestrov’s works on the basis of European modernist, postmodern, and metamodern contexts.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are to be accomplished:

- to compare the understanding of the concept of the string quartet in Western European and Ukrainian musicological traditions and to outline the difference between “genre”, “ensemble type”, and “quartet style”;
- to define the concept of the “genre tradition of the string quartet” as a coherent analytical category;
- to specify the European traditions of the string quartet and their innovative models in correlation with the Ukrainian chamber music context;

- to outline the historical trajectory of the Ukrainian string quartet;
- to identify indicators of genre tradition in Sylvestrov's quartets;
- to carry out analytical case studies of four works: *Quartetto piccolo* (1961), String Quartet No. 1 (1974), String Quartet No. 2 (1988), String Quartet No. 3 (2011) in order to uncover the methods of genre adaptation and mechanisms for transmitting the "memory of the genre".

Review of literature on the topic

The study of the string quartet as a genre tradition and as a specific quartet style has been established in contemporary musicology, while still requiring certain clarifications. The genre-stylistic features, historical profile, and performative characteristics of the chamber string quartet are presented in the monographic volume *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet* (2003), edited by Robin Stowell, within which the articles by Christina Bashford⁴, David Jones⁵, Stephen Hefling⁶, and Robin Stowell⁷ are of particular interest. In the Ukrainian discourse, the quartet domain is likewise broadly represented, as evidenced by the works of Daria Chystiakova (2019)⁸, Nataliia Feshchak (2021)⁹, Iryna Polska (2015)¹⁰, and Anna Antropova (2015)¹¹. The corpus of scholarship on Valentyn Silvestrov's chamber-instrumental output is fairly

⁴ Bashford, Christina. "The string quartet and society". In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 3-18.

⁵ Jones, David. "The origins of the quartet". In *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 175-184.

⁶ Hefling, Stephen. "The Austro-Germanic quartet tradition in the nineteenth century". In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 228-249.

⁷ Stowell, Robin. "Traditional and progressive nineteenth-century trends: France, Italy, Great Britain and America". In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 250-265.

⁸ Chystiakova, Daria. "Strunno-smychkovyi kvartetnyi styl (muzykolohichniy dyskurs)" [The Bowed String Quartet Style (A Musicological Discourse)]. In *Tradytsii i novatsii u vyshchii arkhitekturno-khudozhnii osviti*, Vol. 3, 2019, pp. 117-123.

⁹ Feshchak, Nataliia. "Vykonavski zasady funktsionuvannia ukrainskoho kvartetu: istorichniy aspekt" [Performing Principles of the Functioning of the Ukrainian Quartet: A Historical Aspect.]. In *Chasopys Natsionalnoi muzychnoi akademii im. P. I. Tchaikovskoho*. No.2 (51). 221, pp. 26-41.

¹⁰ Polska, Iryna I. "Kamerno-ansambleve mystetstvo Ukrainy: suchasni shliakhy muzykoznavchych rozvidok" [Chamber Ensemble Art of Ukraine: Contemporary Directions of Musicological Studies]. In *Naukovi zbirky Lvivskoi natsionalnoi muzychnoi akademii im. M. V. Lysenka*, Lviv, Vol. 34 2015, pp. 29-47.

¹¹ Antropova, Anna. "Zhanr strunnoho kvarteta i odeskaya strunnaya shkola" [The Genre of the String Quartet and the Odesa String School]. In *Muzychne mystetstvo i kultura*, Vol. 21, 2015, pp. 415-427.

extensive (see studies by Oleksandr Opanasiuk & Valeriia Kurbatova (2024)¹², Yuliia Chemerys (2017)¹³), yet the composer's quartets remain insufficiently examined from the vantage point of genre tradition - accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by combining a historical-stylistic perspective with performance-oriented analysis.

Materials and methods

The article applies the following research approaches:

- systemic and complex approaches - to describe the structure of genre tradition and its functions within the cultural continuum;
- historical-genetic and contextual approaches - to trace the evolution of the quartet from Classicism to contemporary practices, and to localize the Ukrainian trajectory within the European discourse;
- comparative approach - to juxtapose Western European and Ukrainian concepts of the genre and principles of innovation;
- score-analytical and stylistic methods - to verify indicators of genre tradition in Sylvestrov's quartets;
- intertextual-hermeneutic approach - to interpret "postludial poetics", citation/allusiveness, and the role of silence and resonance in the works under study.

Source base of the study

The research draws on the scores and available audio/video recordings of Sylvestrov's *Quartetto piccolo* (1961) and String Quartets No. 1 (1974), No. 2 (1988), and No. 3 (2011).

Results and Discussions

The string quartet is one of the most representative genres of chamber music, where the principle of equality among voices carries special artistic significance. It can be understood in two ways: as a specific ensemble of

¹² Opanasiuk, Oleksandr & Kurbatova, Valeriia. "«Quartetto piccolo» u konteksti stylovykh pryntsyipiv muzyky Valentyna Sylvestrova" [Quartetto piccolo in the Context of the Stylistic Principles of Valentyn Sylvestrov's Music]. In *Aktualni pytannia humanitarnykh nauk*, Vol. 82, Tom 20, 2024, pp. 114-121).

¹³ Chemerys, Yuliia. "Vykonavska stratehiia strunnoho kvartetu No. 1 Valentyna Sylvestrova u versii kvartetu imeni M. V. Lysenka" [The Performance Strategy of Valentyn Sylvestrov's String Quartet No. 1 in the Version of the M. V. Lysenko Quartet]. In *Ukrainske muzykoznavstvo*, Vol. 43, 2017, pp. 121-129.

performers and as a genre with a distinct structural-aesthetic model. On one hand, it is a timbrally homogeneous group of string instruments (two violins, viola, and cello), following the axiom *one performer – one part*, which ensures a unique balance between individual and collective expression. On the other hand, the quartet represents a genre tradition that incorporates traits of symphonic thinking on a chamber scale.

The intimate nature of the ensemble suited performance in small spaces, creating a heightened emotional communication between performer and listener. Originally, the string quartet inherited the four-movement cycle of the symphony. This structural similarity highlighted both its affinity with and distinction from the symphony: the chamber setting adds clarity, intellectual focus, and the potential for experimentation.

According to Christina Bashford¹⁴, the history of the string quartet began in the mid-18th century with compositions for two violins, viola, and cello, initially called “serenade”, “divertimento”, or “quartetto”. These works were created “for oneself” and for the beauty of sound and intended for intimate, private music-making. Thanks to its timbral unity, the quartet quickly surpassed the trio sonata and became the main form of domestic music, eventually moving onto public stages. The genre crystallized in the works of the Viennese classics – Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven – who established the canonical quartet style.

In the 19th century, the string quartet evolved structurally and stylistically, gaining traits of Romantic expression and individual voice. The Austro-German tradition, represented by Schubert, Louis Spohr, Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, and Brahms, as Stephen Hefling¹⁵ underlines, led this development, combining classical heritage with innovative approaches to thematic development, dramaturgy, and texture. In France, Italy, and Great Britain, the quartet evolved more slowly, tending toward quatuor brillant or concertante models, while the genre’s full symphonic potential remained largely in the German-speaking world¹⁶. American composers, studying in Germany and following European examples, only in the late 19th century began developing their own quartet repertoire, influenced by Dvořák and the Brahmsian tradition. Thus, the 19th century made the string quartet a laboratory

¹⁴ Bashford, Christina. “The string quartet and society”. In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 3-18.

¹⁵ Hefling, Stephen. “The Austro-Germanic quartet tradition in the nineteenth century”. In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 228-249.

¹⁶ Stowell, Robin. “Traditional and progressive nineteenth-century trends: France, Italy, Great Britain and America”. In *The Cambridge Companion to The String Quartet*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 250-265.

of Romantic thinking, with the Austro-German tradition as the leading center of stylistic evolution, shaping the genre beyond Central Europe.

Today, the study of chamber music, including quartets as a distinct genre, remains a key area of musicological research. Chamber music captures the subtlest processes of stylistic evolution and formal experimentation, as evidenced by a substantial body of scholarly work.

In contemporary musicology, Daria Chistyakova's approach, presented in *Stringed-Bowed Quartet Style (Musicological Discourse)*¹⁷ is especially notable. She considers the quartet through the concept of style, defining quartet style as part of the system of sub-generic styles. It has a distinct genre character, follows sonata-cyclic principles, and embodies one of the core principles of chamber music – equality of parts. Chistyakova emphasizes the historical roots of the quartet in amateur music-making, noting its evolution reflects broader European stylistic transformations from the Baroque to the present. She also highlights a symbolic aspect: the number “four” corresponds to sacred ideas (the four cardinal points, temperaments, geometric archetypes, timbral variations), almost sacralizing the quartet's foundation. The concept introduced by Chistyakova “quartet symphonism” shows the specific nature of chamber thinking: symphonic qualities are preserved but adapted to a chamber context, emphasizing lyrical playfulness, dialogue, and a refined balance between parts.

According to the author, each part in a string quartet is a self-sufficient voice, yet it always remains part of the whole ensemble. This duality requires balance – both in the composer's design and in performance. From its beginnings as entertainment in the 18th century, the quartet has grown into an academic genre. It reflects social and cultural changes as well as the artistic ideals of different eras, while still keeping popularity among performers and listeners.

Chistiakova suggests defining the string quartet style as “a type of instrumental-genre style characterized by monotimbrality, genre stability, universalism, and a certain communicative orientation”¹⁸. Its essence lies in stable genre content, established cyclical models (sometimes condensed into short quartet-poems), and a specific performative balance that comes from the equal distribution of material among voices.

¹⁷ Chystiakova, Daria. “Strunno-smychkovy kvartetnyi styl (muzykolohichniy dyskurs)” [The Bowed String Quartet Style (A Musicological Discourse)]. In *Tradytsii i novatsii u vyshchii arkhitekturno-khudozhnii osviti*, Vol. 3, 2019, pp. 117-123.

¹⁸ Chystiakova, Daria. “Strunno-smychkovy kvartetnyi styl (muzykolohichniy dyskurs)” [The Bowed String Quartet Style (A Musicological Discourse)]. In *Tradytsii i novatsii u vyshchii arkhitekturno-khudozhnii osviti*, Vol. 3, 2019, p. 121.

In today's musicological discourse, the quartet is seen as a complex phenomenon. It unites performance practice, genre form, and stylistic identity. Ukrainian scholars have shown that the quartet is not just four instruments or a fixed cycle. Rather, it is a special *form of chamber thinking*. It combines musical practice with a type of intellectual reflection on sound and structure.

It's important to mention that the quartet is also a "text of culture". It brings together intonational archetypes of different times and carries sociocultural meanings. Its path from salon music-making to high academism shows its ability to absorb new stylistic tendencies while keeping structural stability. In this way, the quartet mirrors the European musical process - from Baroque to Postmodernism - each era finding its own chamber voice.

At the same time, if we consider the string quartet as a genre tradition, certain interesting observations and additions arise, especially when it comes to analyzing contemporary compositional practice. To clarify briefly, a genre tradition is not an archive of ready-made norms, but a dynamic coherent system of invariants and expectations, within which works preserve the identity of the genre while constantly renewing themselves. The genre exists as a network of connections between structure (form, texture, dramaturgy), performative practice (standard bowing practice, ensemble balance, acoustic environment), and reception (listener's horizon of expectations, canon of interpretations). Invariant components are at its core (semantic markers, form models, types of thematic development, roles of voices, etc.) crystallized historically and preserved in every work; variable layers are surrounding the core (new techniques, stylistic features, intertextual codes), which activate mechanisms of renewal.

In the string quartet, genre tradition manifests with the greatest optical clarity, since the monotimbrality of the ensemble (two violins, viola, cello) and the principle *one performer - one part* make any innovation instantly noticeable in relation to genre invariants. Here tradition functions both as the memory of form (historically codified schemes from Haydn to Beethoven) and as a living matrix that absorbs new sonic, often experimental modes, preventing the genre from losing its identity.

Thus, ontological multidimensionality makes the quartet an exceptionally productive object for studying contemporary compositional strategies and the "life" of genre tradition.

The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are marked by the greatest freedom of self-expression, not only in music but in the arts more generally. Works appear that employ sound effects achieved not only by means of instrumental techniques but also through the use of sound technology and everyday objects. In Western European practice of this period, the string quartet is increasingly conceived as a laboratory of

acoustic experience - a space where sound (with its microtimbral shifts, textural granularity, and noise articulations) becomes the primary construct, while form emerges as “secondary crystallization” (through processes of layering, rarefaction, and condensation). In this field of exploring sound and texture, European avant-garde composers proposed several models of radical rethinking of instrumentation. In György Ligeti - from the early, still Bartókian in temperament, String Quartet No. 1 *Métamorphoses nocturnes* (1953–1954) to the Second Quartet (1968), where micropolyphony forms dense moving sound fields in which local events merge into a continuous sonotype of thick sound. In Iannis Xenakis, stochastic logic (*ST/4*, 1956–1962) and sonoristic technique (*Tetras*, 1983) transform the ensemble into an acoustic “continuum”, where the dotted metric pulse dissolves into the statistics of events. Helmut Lachenmann introduces “instrumental musique concrète”: in *Gran Torso* (1972), *Reigen seliger Geister* (1989), and *Grido* (2001), the instrument’s body, frictional noises, muted attacks, and audible «defects» of sound become carriers of meaning; an aesthetics of air arises, where silence is not a pause but an active resonator of meanings.

The American scene demonstrates two poles: intellectual complexity and minimalist contemplative quality. In Elliott Carter, the String Quartet No. 2 (1959) personifies each instrument as an autonomous character, while the String Quartet No. 3 (1971) divides the ensemble into two duos with different temporal “wave-lengths”, a model of polymetric multilingualism. George Crumb, in *Black Angels* (1970), electrifies timbre by combining arco and pizzicato, percussive effects, and vocalizations within a tragic allegory of war; the quartet becomes a ritualized theatre of sound. The minimalist trajectory is exemplified by Steve Reich (*Different Trains*, 1988; *Triple Quartet*, 1998), in which speech samples, train sounds, and recurring motifs combine to form a documentary-musical palimpsest. Similarly, Philip Glass (*Company*, 1983; *Mishima*, 1985; No. 5, 1991) employs repetitive transparency and modal stability, exerting an “acculturating influence” on European chamber music - not undermining its tradition, but redirecting it toward an awareness of temporal perception.

In the 21st century we observe not a rejection of radicalism, but its intellectual reinterpretation. Jörg Widmann (the cycle of five quartets, 1997–2005) constructs a polylogue with tradition - from chorale polyphony (*Choralquartett*, 2003) to the “experience of the fugue” with soprano voice (*Versuch über die Fuge*, 2005) - demonstrating how genre tradition becomes material for contemporary rhetoric. Georg Friedrich Haas shifts the focus to the perceptual situation: *In iij. Noct.* (2001) is performed in complete darkness, radicalizing auditory attention and exposing the micro-intervallic shadows

between voices. Caroline Shaw (*Entr'acte*, 2011; *The Evergreen*, 2020) combines post-minimalist clarity with historical allusions, so that the genre tradition of the quartet emerges gently in new acoustic projections.

The history of the Ukrainian string quartet unfolds as a continuous line beginning in the second half of the 19th century. The first example of the Ukrainian quartet genre was Mykola Lysenko's String Quartet in D minor (1868), written during his studies in Leipzig (within the German genre tradition!). Despite the cycle's incompleteness (the absence of a finale), the work attested to an organic synthesis of European form with Ukrainian song intonations. In the 1920s – 1930s, Lev Revutsky and Borys Lyatoshynsky made significant contributions, combining the European classical model with Ukrainian melodic idioms; at the same time, Viktor Kosenko created chamber works that constituted the core of the repertoire. The postwar period (1940s–1950s) was marked by the activities of Dmytro Klebanov and Heorhiy Taranov, who expanded the stylistic horizons of the quartet within the Kharkiv and Kyiv schools. The second half of the twentieth century represents the flourishing of the genre in the interpretations of Yevhen Stankovych, Myroslav Skoryk, and especially Valentyn Sylvestrov (1960s – 1990s), whose works transform the quartet into a space of experiment and philosophical reflection.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Ukrainian string quartet established itself as a phenomenon of pan-European significance, absorbing local folkloric intonations while simultaneously integrating into global tendencies of chamber music-making. The history of the Ukrainian string quartet is examined in greater detail in the article by Anna Antropova¹⁹, where the scholar attempts to systematize the corpus of works within this genre written by Ukrainian composers. Summarizing her research, one may conclude that almost every professional composer has had experience with the quartet genre, most likely under the influence of traditions within academic musical education. At the same time, there are also composers who devoted more sustained attention to the quartet. Among them are Borys Lyatoshynsky (4 quartets), Volodymyr Kostenko (8), Petro Haidamaka (9), Dmytro Klebanov (6), Andrii Filipenko (5), Ihor Shamo (5), Yurii Ishchenko (15), Valentyn Huba (6), Volodymyr Bibik (5), Bohdana Froliak (4), and Valentyn Sylvestrov (4). Most of these works were composed in the second half of the twentieth century, a fact directly connected to particular historical events and the general situation in the country. The experimental zone that emerged in Ukrainian quartet music in

¹⁹ Antropova, Anna. "Zhanr strunnoho kvarteta i odeskaya strunnaya shkola" [The Genre of the String Quartet and the Odesa String School]. In *Muzychne mystetstvo i kultura*, Vol. 21, 2015, pp. 415-427.

the 1960s encompassed theatricalization and happening (performance art). Yet despite these experiments with instrumental resources, the Ukrainian string quartet preserved its traditional instrumentation. Innovations were primarily directed toward formal solutions (single-movement structures with non-conflict dramaturgy), texture (a predominance of linear polyphony), stylistic aspects, and sound production techniques (*sul tasto*, *sul ponticello*, *col legno*, *al tallone*, various types of harmonics).

In the 21st century, the number of composers turning to the genre has diminished considerably. Among the significant contributions are: Two String Quartets (2000) by Yurii Laniuk; Quartets No. 4 and 5 (2002) by Volodymyr Bibik; Quartet No. 3 (2003) by Hanna Havrylets; String Quartet (2009) by Alla Zagaykevych; Quartet No. 4 *Lux aeterna* (2011) by Bohdana Froliak; Quartet No. 3 (2011) by Valentyn Sylvestrov; Quartet No. 15 (2011) by Yurii Ishchenko; String Quartet in C Major (2011) by Oleksii Retynsky; *Walking on the Waters* (2013) by Viktoria Poleva; Quartets No. 2 (2008/2021), No. 4 *Poltava* (2018), and *Maria's City Mariupol* (2022) by Zoltan Almashi; and *Drop after Drop* (2022) by Maksym Shalyhin.

Valentyn Sylvestrov (b. 1937, Kyiv) is one of the most renowned Ukrainian composers, a representative of the Kyiv school (Borys Liatoshynsky's student), who was shaped by the Kyiv avant-garde of the 1960s and evolved from serial and sonoristic techniques toward a postmodern poetics he himself defines as "metamusic". His style conceives music as a "text of memory": fragile cantilena lines; modal-triadic fields with suspended tonality; extremely soft dynamics with long fading resonances; silence and resonance as form-building principles; and allusions and quotations reinterpreted within a "postlude aesthetics". Sylvestrov's vast oeuvre lies at the intersection of Ukrainian tradition and the broader European lineage, embodying Ukraine's contribution to the contemporary European musical discourse, in which form is perceived as echo and time is experienced as memory.

Sylvestrov's chamber music is characterized by the use of atypical ensemble structures and forms, polyphonic techniques, and sharp tonal juxtapositions between instruments. In his early period, inspired by new stylistic currents in Western music and mastering contemporary compositional devices, he opened a new page in the history of Ukrainian music. He introduced dodecaphony and sonoristics into his works. In the 1970s, the composer gradually abandoned the traditional devices of the avant-garde in favor of postmodernism. Equally characteristic – perhaps central – to his style is quotation, or, as has been observed, "...the various types of work with borrowed material in V. Sylvestrov's music range from quotation, stylization, and

anagramming to stylistic allusion and self-quotation”²⁰. Indeed, the composer often drew more on his own earlier material than on that of others. His First String Quartet exemplifies this tendency: the desire to juxtapose “the past” and “the future” in striking contrast. Sylvestrov himself calls his style “metamusic” or “metaphorical music”. The works of this period are marked by a contemplative and meditative atmosphere. The engagement with styles of past epochs – characteristic of postmodernism more broadly – occupies an especially important place in his creative output.

The chronology of Valentyn Sylvestrov's string quartets is as follows: *Quartetto piccolo* (1961), String Quartet No. 1 (1974), No. 2 (1988), and No. 3 (2011). This sequence makes it possible to trace the development of the genre within the context of Sylvestrov's creative evolution. These works reflect the shift of artistic orientations and the profound semantic transformations of his compositional thought and style.

Quartetto piccolo deserves particular attention, as it already reveals the foundations of the composer's individual style. It was in the early 1960s that Sylvestrov began his intensive creative activity, and in the works of this period one can discern features that later became fundamental stylistic landmarks of his music. Scholars define *Quartetto piccolo* as his first dodecaphonic work, comprising three miniature movements united into a single form (*attacca*), each of thirty seconds to one minute in duration (*Allegro*, *Andante*, *Allegretto*)²¹. The quartet demonstrates Sylvestrov's recourse to the stylistic premises of the musical avant-garde. At the same time, it already contains elements that would later become characteristic of his entire output: a cantabile musical texture, subdued emotionality, and a restrained, intimate quality of expression. This meditative, contemplative orientation was to become central in the composer's subsequent works. Such artistic intentions may be seen as the result of a conscious turn toward the “peripheral” zones of musical language, including unconventional manifestations of avant-garde expressivity. Even in the 1970s, when Sylvestrov moved away from radical avant-gardism and shaped his own original style – one he himself referred to as “weak” or “irrelevant” – the fundamental avant-garde principles remained embedded in the deep structure of his music.

²⁰ Hribinienko, Yuri. *Teoretychni ta katehorialni zasady muzychnoi tekstolohii yak aktualnoi muzykoznavchoi dystsyplyny* (Theoretical and Categorical Foundations of Musical Textology as a Relevant Musicological Discipline). Odesa. 2023, p. 190.

²¹ Opanasiuk, Oleksandr & Kurbatova, Valeriia. “«Quartetto piccolo» u konteksti stylovykh pryntsyviv muzyky Valentyna Sylvestrova” [Quartetto piccolo in the Context of the Stylistic Principles of Valentyn Sylvestrov's Music]. In *Aktualni pytannia humanitarnykh nauk*, Vol. 82, Tom 20, 2024, p. 116.

This style resonates with the notion of a “metastyle”, a term used at the end of the twentieth century to characterize the general situation in European compositional practice²².

In *Quartetto piccolo* one may observe the influence of Anton Webern’s music, although Sylvestrov did not confine himself to direct imitation. Through his specific melodic thinking, the use of vocalized intonations, and a carefully balanced application of minimalist techniques, his music acquires a deeper dimension, moving into the sphere of phenomenological contemplation of existence and musical imagery. Numerous studies emphasize lyricism as one of Sylvestrov’s defining stylistic traits. Importantly, lyricism emerges not only in works marked by gentle emotionality or contemplative content, but also in compositions where dramatic tension plays a central role. This is due to the profound conceptualization of melody, which becomes the leading principle of musical expression, shaping both form and the overall idea of the work. Thus, the artistic intentions and emphases laid down in *Quartetto piccolo* became the foundation of the stylistic model for Sylvestrov’s subsequent music.

String Quartet No. 1 (1974) belongs to the so-called post-avant-garde period of Sylvestrov’s work. “The features of monologic expression, ultimate lyricism of utterance, and reliance on vocal intonations as the embodiment of the human element can be observed in this Quartet (despite the absence of vocal parts)”²³. At that time, Sylvestrov not only abandoned avant-garde techniques but also sought to create a new quality of sound, built on the contrast between the poetics of the past and the aggressive expressivity of the present, typical of avant-garde stylistics. The composition unfolds as a dialogue between romantic and modern musical traditions. This concept is manifested in signs of the romantic style: clear Schubertian harmonies, the square symmetry of certain themes, tonal definition, and intonational allusions. These, however, are opposed by the structural elements of contemporary sound: sonoric textures, cluster sequences, improvisatory facture, and atonality²⁴.

In Quartet No. 1 the inner drama and compositional tension become evident, realized through figurative and structural contrasts. For instance,

²² Idem, p. 118.

²³ Chemerys, Yuliia. “Vykonavska stratehiia strunnoho kvartetu No. 1 Valentyna Sylvestrova u versii kvartetu imeni M. V. Lysenka” (The Performance Strategy of Valentyn Sylvestrov’s String Quartet No. 1 in the Version of the M. V. Lysenko Quartet). In *Ukrainske muzykoznavstvo*, Vol. 43, 2017, p. 123.

²⁴ Hribinienko, Yurii. *Teoretychni ta katehorialni zasady muzychnoi tekstolohii yak aktualnoi muzykoznavchoi dystsypliny* (Theoretical and Categorical Foundations of Musical Textology as a Relevant Musicological Discipline). Odesa. 2023, p. 198.

the introductory section, written in the manner of a calm, almost classical chorale-like episode, is sharply contrasted by clusters built on seconds, which intermittently break through the musical texture of the piece. The structure of the quartet grows out of the principle of contrastive development, taking on the shape that can be described as a variant of sonata form with features of rondo, manifested through the recurrence of the opening theme in its original form.

The contrast between past and present defined in String Quartet no. 1 later grew into one of the key ideas and worldviews of the composer's mature oeuvre – the concept of postludiality, vividly embodied in String Quartet No. 2 (1988). Postludiality is expressed through multiple phases of decline and fading, appearing at different levels of musical structure: cluster stratifications after which the music «dissolves into a whisper», delicate upper-register lines, and soft low pedals of cello and viola. One of the unique features is the use of a sonic pedal that creates an atmosphere of allusions and hints. Another important postmodern paradigm of the composer is also evident in this quartet – indeterminacy. It manifests itself in the absence of a clear compositional scheme, a certain spontaneity of thought, rhythmic organization, intonational material, and the overall level of sound, which often borders on silence. The work is single movement, with a conditional division into sections. These consist of alternating static «islands» and outbursts: the almost motionless exposition of soft consonances and dotted upper-register motifs; the subsequent thickening of the texture into quiet clusters (trills/tremolo); the climax with dense cluster tones at extreme forte, followed by a collapse into silence; the return of fragments of the opening material in allusive sonority; and the postludial coda – fading into an almost inaudible whisper.

Silvestrov's String Quartet No. 3 (2011) can be considered one of the most striking examples of 21st-century academic music. This work holds an important place in the composer's chamber-instrumental oeuvre and in contemporary Ukrainian music in general. In the score the composer indicates the use of "Irish intonations". According to his own testimony, the decisive impulse for completing the quartet came from his journey to Ireland and interaction with the Louth Contemporary Music Society, which activated drone-modal formulas, an extended cantilena, and pastoral topoi, integrated into the postludial poetics of the piece. The premiere took place at London's Barbican Centre, performed by the renowned Kronos Quartet, for whom the work was written.

The quartet is written in a contrasting composite form and consists of seven parts (Prelude – Pastorale – Intermezzo – Intermezzo – Serenade – Intermezzo – Postlude), which exhibit cyclic-type contrast with alternating

tonal and atonal sections. A notable feature of this quartet is its dynamics, which are built primarily around *p* (or *pp*), at times suddenly contrasting and reaching *ff*.

The Prelude (*Andante*) emerges as the initial gesture of narrative – a continuous “breath” of the cycle, where short ascending intonational seeds (second, third) grow into a pulsating texture with controlled spontaneity of meter and articulation; the dynamics expand from muffled whispers to sudden “bursts” (*pp* ↔ *ff*), while the deep resonance of the cello pedal forms an acoustic foundation and a special aura of the texture, upon which the upper voices “reveal” themselves as reflections of memory.

Pastorale does not aspire to classical idyll: it is a slowed-down modal cantilena with Irish expansiveness and drone supports, unfolding almost seamlessly; ostinato “swayings” in the middle voices interact with sustained viola/cello pedals, while the leading violin traces a theme as a chiaroscuro line of serenity, where tonal definiteness and balanced microdynamics (*p–pp–ppp*) are perceptible.

The first Intermezzo opens with an agitated, almost anxious impulse; its framed form (*Animato–Andantino–Animato*) is subordinated to the dramaturgy of contrast, with the middle section (*Andantino*) serving as a lyrical center with clear harmonic support and allusions to Schubert-Brahmsian melody, balancing the outer segments, where dissonant complexes with large intervallic leaps “call across” between the parts, creating the effect of polyphonic relief.

The second Intermezzo reduces expression to short, almost aphoristic phrases – intonational fragments passed from voice to voice; structural pauses acquire the status of semantic events (not “absence”, but a condensation of meaning), producing a ghostly, “non-figurative” concentration.

Serenade – the cycle’s center of gravity – appears as a nocturnal chiaroscuro song: a simple, almost archaic cantilena (cantabile of the first violin) with trichordal formulas pulsing amid soft secondal suspensions; the illusion of waltz-like motion arises and instantly dissolves into silence. This is not a “genre-in-itself” but its postludial reflection – music as echo, as allusion to recognizable cultural codes gathered into a timbral-intonational knot before dispersing in the final sections.

The third Intermezzo returns to the motivic formulas of the earlier intermezzi (secondal intonations, drone supports) but densifies the texture: ostinato “slabs” in the lower voices appear, alongside triplet exchanges and dissonant clusters; harmonics and pizzicato function as “distant clocks of time” – dotted markers of memory in the acoustic field.

The Postlude concludes the cycle not as a rhetorical summation, but as a letting-go of sound: thematic shadows reappear in a modified form, as

if through a resonant filter; the texture becomes more polyphoned, with sound pedals and triplet cells migrating among the parts to form mobile architectonics. Long bass notes bring pacification, while isolated pizzicato strokes act as fading echoes; the final bars (*ppp*) model silence not as emptiness, but as an active resonator of meaning – an emblem of Silvestrov's metamusic.

Conclusions

The string quartet as a “laboratory of form” confirms its heuristic nature, especially in the 20th – 21st centuries, within the context of music from different regions of the world. In Ukrainian musical creativity, the role of Valentyn Silvestrov is highly significant, as his quartets function as “metatexts” of European chamber music, where romantic memory and modernist ruptures merge into postludial poetics (silence and resonance as formative features, allusions/quotations as modes of memory, etc.). Indicators of tradition in his opuses are fixed at the levels of form, texture, and intonational formulas. Quartet No. 3 emerges as particularly illustrative, which demonstrates how extrageneric codes (Irish modality) are integrated into the quartet matrix through drone supports, pastoral rhetoric, and postludial frames, becoming an example of intercultural adaptation without diluting identity. This confirms the understanding of the quartet genre not as a “set of norms”, but as a dynamic network of relations between structure, performance, and reception. Thus, the genre tradition of the string quartet in the Ukrainian European context emerges as a self-renewing system in which the invariant of chamber thinking is preserved, while Silvestrov's oeuvre becomes one of its semantic centers, within which the quartet turns into a relevant model of musical memory.

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